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ABSTRACT

At the university level, case-based education is a significant feature of professional training programs conducted for law, medicine, and business studies. Cases take various forms including real and imagined scenarios, critical incident analysis, case studies, vignettes, and anecdotal accounts of professional practice. Although case-based education has played a relatively minor role in teacher education, there is evidence of new interest in this approach. This interest is associated with growing concerns about the limitations of traditional teacher education programs and an increasing recognition and acknowledgement of the ambiguity and complexity of teaching and learning. In an attempt to portray the multi-faceted nature of teaching, the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning has chosen to use cases to illustrate the Framework for Competency Standards for the Teaching Profession. This paper reports on issues that emerged when developing cases for the project. Further, the paper links this study with current interest in case-based teaching for teacher education and examines the potential, possibilities, and practicalities of using case-based approaches for professional development. A sample vignette is appended.
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ED 375 145

Portraits of teaching: Using work-based vignettes

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ABSTRACT

At a university level, case-based education is a significant feature of professional training programs conducted for law, medicine and business studies. Cases take various forms including real and imagined scenarios, critical incident analysis, case studies, vignettes and anecdotal accounts of professional practice. Although case-based education has played a relatively minor role in teacher education, there is evidence of new interest in this approach. This interest is associated with growing concerns about the limitations of traditional teacher education programs and an increasing recognition and acknowledgment of the ambiguity and complexity of teaching and learning.

In an attempt to portray the multi-faceted nature of teaching, the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning has chosen to use cases to illustrate the Framework for Competency Standards for the Teaching Profession. This paper reports on issues that emerged when developing cases for the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning. Further, the paper links this study with the current interest in case-based teaching for teacher education and examines the potential and possibilities of using cases for professional development. As a team of teacher educators we are interested in the practicalities of using case-based approaches. This roundtable paper presentation will include time for sharing ideas and experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Case-based education enables learners to analyse and reflect upon the experiences of practitioners as part of their own professional development. The approach is predicated on the theory that adult learning is enhanced when the learning environment values what the learner brings to the situation, when teaching resources are personally relevant, and when the learner is engaged with the teaching materials. These criteria are evident in case-based pedagogy.

At a university level, case-based education is a significant feature of professional training programs conducted for law, medicine and business studies. Although case-based education has played a relatively minor role in teacher education, there is evidence of new interest in this approach (Doyle, 1990; Merseth, 1991; Richert, 1991; Shulman, 1992; McAninch, 1993; Dockett and Tegel, 1993, Wassermann, 1993). This interest is associated with growing concerns about the limitations of traditional teacher education programs, and an increasing recognition and acknowledgment of the ambiguity and complexity of teaching and learning. Thus, the use of case-based approaches in teacher education may contrast with some professional training programs which expect neophytes to learn the standard responses to set scenarios.

The term case-based education has a range of interpretations. In the first instance, cases take various forms including real and imagined scenarios, critical incidents, case studies, vignettes and anecdotal accounts of professional practice. In addition, a number of characteristics contribute to the variations encountered in case-based education.

(i) Cases differ in their length and complexity. These elements, however, may not be mutually exclusive; that is shorter materials are not necessarily less complex. Differences in length and complexity may also relate to terminology which is

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used for case materials. For example, the term vignette may be used to identify shorter and less detailed materials.

(ii) There are varying degrees of completeness evident in case materials. Some cases are deliberately open-ended and enable the reader to suggest possible outcomes, while others are designed as complete scenarios.

(iii) Case materials vary in degrees of formality. There is a continuum that includes informal anecdotes of experience on one end, and formally structured crafted cases at the other. The continuum includes such resources as written materials prepared for tutorial purposes based on personal experiences or hypothetical situations.

(iv) There are differences in the nature of support provided for case materials. Cases may be free-standing for illustrative purposes or they may be accompanied by preprinted material for peer discussion facilitated by a tutor. Alternative approaches may either include printed responses from commentators which add additional perspectives to the cases, or focus on learner-generated discussion material.

CASE-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION

Case-based education is a useful preservice and inservice resource for teacher education, as cases provide opportunities for analysis and reflection upon the nature of teachers' work. For example, cases are potentially useful in teacher education "... for teaching about subject matter, classroom management, inquiry and reflection on teaching, and knowledge traditionally conveyed in foundations courses", (Sykes, 1992, p. vii).

The proponents of case-based teacher education argue that the descriptive nature of cases provides an opportunity for presenting teachers' work in all of its complexity. "Teaching tradeoffs and dilemmas emerge from the text as do the strategies teachers use, the frustrations they experience, the brilliant and less-brilliant decisions they make, the actions they take, the knowledge they bring to bear, and so on" (Richert, 1991, p.136).

Typically, cases feature context-specific narratives of teaching and learning. The situational nature of cases is significant as it portrays teachers' work as integrated actions, thoughts, beliefs and feelings. "Ideas, actions and feelings are not isolated from each other. Rather, one idea leads to another which leads to a feeling and possibly another idea, an action, a set of feelings, a different feeling and so on" (Richert, 1991, p.136). Cases illustrate events as they occur in real life. The dimensions of teachers' work can be illustrated as dilemmas or problems associated with a broad set of teacher-related concerns.

Case materials contribute to the knowledge and professional expertise of student teachers by helping them develop skills of critical analysis and problem solving. Effective cases contain attributes of both theory and practice, thus enabling student teachers to examine real-life situations and develop professional judgement.

> *The most powerful case for cases in teacher education is that they embody and help explore an important new conception of teacher knowledge. This pedagogy has the potential to serve as a transformative force in the revitalisation of the teacher education curriculum.*
>
> (Merseth, 1991, p.28).

Case materials also provide a basis for a range of worthwhile professional activities for more experienced teachers. Appropriate cases can encourage teachers to engage in reflection and dialogue, while supporting and empowering personal and professional development.

> *The literature on educational improvement makes it clear that reflection and substantive conversation among teachers are important ingredients in the improvement of schools ... cases become catalysts for pedagogical conversations among members of school communities. They stimulate teachers' individual reflections on their own teaching as well as providing a basis for dialogue and interactions among teachers themselves.*
>
> (Shulman, 1992, p. xv).

ISSUES RELATED TO CASE DEVELOPMENT

In an attempt to portray the multi-faceted nature of teaching, the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) has chosen to use cases to illustrate the Framework for Competency Standards for the Teaching Profession. This decision recognises the value of including work-based materials for professional development. In 1993, as part of NPQTL project, the authors successfully tendered to collect early childhood cases for the Framework of Competency Standards. While completing this work a number of issues were raised which have general applicability to the development of cases.

(i) origin of cases

Cases come from a variety of sources. Researchers may gather 'real life' stories from teachers and craft the narratives into cases, or they may observe teachers at work and use the data for case development. As well, cases may be generated by an 'armchair writer' creating situations to illustrate a particular point. Some cases are crafted through a combination of these approaches. For example, a teacher educator may develop a case for tutorial purposes by recalling a particular experience and completing the case with imaginary detail.

Alternatively, there is increasing interest in encouraging teachers to write their own cases for professional development purposes. Both qualified teachers and student teachers can benefit from the processes involved in case writing. Shulman (1991, p132) argues that many teachers can write 'compelling narratives' that provide powerful learning experiences for the authors.

(ii) *purpose of cases*

The ultimate use of case materials must be considered at the time of case development. For example, materials developed to support the Framework of Competency Standards needed to be framed as vignettes, whereas materials used in teacher education programs might more usefully be developed as contextualised detailed cases. When teachers are crafting cases for their own professional development an alternative approach may be necessary.

(iii) content of cases

Cases are generally collected to illustrate teachers' work for the purpose of preservice and inservice professional development. Therefore cases may deal with anything which

is within the teacher's area of professional responsibility. For example, cases may illustrate aspects of teaching including the creation and management of learning environments, and interactions with children. In addition, cases may focus on interactions between staff members, communication with resource personnel and relationships with families.

(iv) case construction issues

The development of multi-layered cases is a complex enterprise. Decisions related to data gathering and analysis will influence the type of product. For example, data may be collected by observing teachers-in-action to depict real-life situations. These data will be shaped by the observation skills and orientation of the observer. Sophisticated skills are necessary to appropriately identify the boundaries of an observation and to highlight key components of the observed interactions.

Teachers who are writing their own cases are often assisted by teacher educators who conference drafts of the cases and encourage teachers to reflect upon the events described. It is valuable for the teacher educators to be experienced in observing teachers at work, as by participating in field observation and discussion for the purposes of crafting cases, the researcher is then more able to value teacher-generated cases.

(v) ethical dilemmas of editing

When cases are being crafted there is potential for ethical dilemmas to arise. Cases do not emerge as complete entities, rather the text may be incomplete or unclear to a reader. If the case is being developed by a teacher in a collaborative situation with other practitioners acting as an editing team, it is possible that the original intention of the teacher will be diffused by the contributions of the group.

If a researcher is responsible for crafting a case after a practitioner has submitted a draft, there may be other ethical dilemmas to be faced. For example, the researcher may wish to complete the picture or round out the scenario by adding details which do not represent the actual events. The decision to change or substitute material based on real-life cases may be appropriate in some circumstances, but should not be undertaken lightly.

(vi) examples verses exemplars

An issue related to case development that is not often highlighted in the literature is whether cases are intended to be examples or exemplars of professional practice. In other words, should those materials which are produced present a range of possible behaviours or attempt to portray excellence in teaching? It may be worthwhile for materials intended to promote the public image of teachers to be based on exemplars, while cases produced for teacher education may be more valuable if based on actual examples of practice.

It may also be useful to consider the degree to which cases should be explored either for their normative or their unique characteristics. Normative aspects of cases are seen to "... illustrate patterns of thought that are characteristic of seasoned professionals" (Kagan, 1993, p.705). Such elements are seen to represent the generic qualities of teaching. On the other hand, the unique elements of a case demonstrate professional behaviour that is practitioner specific.

Kagan argues that "...teaching may be the only clinical profession that acknowledges and promotes uniqueness of practice" (1993, p.706).

One can use classroom cases to describe and promote the kind of clinical thinking that is characteristic of most teachers; this includes both generic and context-specific pedagogical reasoning. However, one can also use cases to reveal cognition that is uniquely characteristic of one particular teacher and to promote the development of qualities that make a teacher's practice unique.

(Kagan, 1993, p.715).

USING CASES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Having developed the cases, decisions have to be made about their use for professional development.

Potentially cases could be used by:

* individual teachers for self-reflection,
* individual teachers in consultation with mentors or supervisors,
* small groups of teachers as part of staff development within a school,
* groups of teachers working together across schools, and
* large groups of teachers working through systemic professional development programs.

For example, teachers could be given a single case and asked to find similarities and differences between the case and their own teaching practices. They might then generate labels that describe the elements of teaching that the case exemplifies for them. This sequence of activities would help make the case personally relevant.

Cases are particularly useful in reflective activities concerned with the complexity of teaching. They are also more able to illustrate the inseparable nature of thought, feeling and action in teaching. As a result, they enable teachers to workshop the inter-connectedness of the varying elements of a teacher's role.

QUESTIONS TO BE USED WITH CASES

Cases should be the catalyst for pedagogical conversations among members of educational communities by providing a focus for dialogue and interaction. Discussions can be used to stimulate reflection and evaluation of personal teaching practices. The discussion should occur in an atmosphere of genuine inquiry and acceptance. Key issues may be summarised and participants should be encouraged to relate the cases to their own experiences. The case materials may also be related to theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning processes. Participants may generate alternative possibilities and outcomes for situations which have been described. Selected episodes may also lend themselves to role-play experiences.

The selection of appropriate discussion strategies may include questions that are specific to the particular case. Alternatively, the discussion may include generic questions which are potentially applicable for most case materials.

The following questions illustrate a generic approach to case discussion:

* What theoretical perspectives appear to be evident ?
* What values does the teacher seem to hold?
* What educational processes are revealed?
* If you had been involved, what would you have done differently?
* What are the positive aspects of the teacher's actions?
* What other options did the teacher have?
* What might be the difference between a novice teacher and an experienced teacher in handling this situation?
* Can you generate an example from your own teaching which would be helpful in the discussion of issues raised in the material?

Appropriate questions should be selected for particular cases either by individual teachers or group leaders. Other questions or professional development strategies could be generated for particular groups or circumstances.

AN EXAMPLE

To highlight the range of possibilities for teacher education, some strategies are presented for the vignette "I hate pets" (See Appendix A). This vignette was collected from a thoughtful third year student teacher and has potential as a discussion starter for teachers at all levels of professional development.

Teachers being introduced to the notion of "reflection in professional practice" could work with this vignette as a discussion starter intended to result in the generation of personal definitions. The larger group might subsequently arrive at a group definition of reflection for the purposes of group interaction, but each small group will have raised related issues and perhaps generated personal reflective episodes which could be shared with the larger group.

Another scenario might be the situation where a group of beginning teachers were discussing the use of worksheets in K-2 classrooms. The child's work sample might be tabled without the vignette for staff to generate ideas about the potential purposes for and value of interest inventories. Following this discussion, the vignette might be tabled to regenerate discussion from a different perspective, that of exploring a child's thoughts and feelings rather than seeking information or correct answers.

An individual teacher looking through a collection of case materials might choose this vignette as a starting point for beginning a personal professional reflective journal. The thought processes demonstrated by this student teacher might enable the reader to explore his or her own thought processes. This might be a gentle entry point for the reader to choose critical incidents from recent events to contribute to such a professional journal.

A teacher educator might select this vignette to challenge student teachers to locate this teacher's practice within particular theoretical perspectives. There might then be

potential for observing video-clips of teaching and hypothesising what might have been the intention and reality for the teacher in the situation. After revisiting the "I hate pets" vignette, student teachers could then reflect on recent situations where they found their intention for work with children was not matched by the reality.

Experienced teachers could be given this vignette and asked to propose ways that they could use it for professional development opportunities with less-experienced colleagues. This strategy of teaching others is recognised as a valuable way to enhance one's own learning.

Other combinations and permutations of these development strategies would present themselves to people working with this vignette and related materials.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of issues which emerge from a decision to use case-based resources for professional development. A range of these have been highlighted in this paper. In addition, possibilities for teacher development have been explored.

This rapidly expanding area is providing new opportunities for teacher educators. One of the most powerful benefits is that case-based resources may be the vehicle that enables the learner to integrate theory and practice in a constructive and personally relevant way. If this is indeed the situation, it will indeed be worth the challenge of developing appropriate case-based resources.

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The authors would be delighted to hear from readers who are using cases in their work with teachers. We can be contacted at the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, 2109.

APPENDIX 1

Sample vignette: "I hate pets"

This vignette was collected from a third year student who presented it as a written reflective episode describing her own practice in a recent fieldwork experience

In order to better understand the children in my Grade Two class during my final semester of early childhood field experience, I devised a questionnaire asking a variety of questions. One question was 'My pet's name is ...'

In respect of this question, Daniel had crossed out this question and wrote:
'I hate the word pet'.

I am ashamed to admit that when I saw this at home, I was immediately quite cross. I took it quite personally and I was offended. I felt it was a simple question requiring a simple answer. I felt I was a reasonable and agreeable person, and I had never forced any child to answer any question if they didn't want to do so. Therefore, he didn't have any right to cross out one of MY questions and write a silly comment such as the fact that he didn't like the word 'pet'.

Daniel was away sick for a few days, so I wasn't able to ask him about it until nearly a week later. I reminded him of the question on the sheet and of the comment he had written, then I asked him why he didn't like the word 'pet'.

At first, Daniel didn't want to talk about it. I have to admit that I thought he was just trying to avoid to confront that he had done something inappropriate. However, Henry was seated next to him and overheard the question. He said he knew all about it. Daniel told him not to say anything, but Henry blurted out that Daniel's cat had recently died.

Daniel then reluctantly told me that it was true. He looked upset and said that he still felt sad. He said that when he had read the question it made him want to cry. I apologised for the fact that the question had upset him and that it had brought back sad memories for him. He seemed to accept my apology and said that it was okay.

I made a mental note never to jump to erroneous conclusions about children's intentions without giving them the benefit of the doubt and asking them about it first.

My name is Daniel

The names of the other people in my family are Alexander, Kate, Terry

I live with my paramts and sister.

I was born in ~~1985~~ 1985

My mother was born in 1963

My father was born in 1946

The languages I can speak are Greek and Australian.

My friends names are Martin Paul Jessica Jacob Shaun Henry Elon Aric Patrik Hul Patrick Mk

~~My pet's name is~~

I hate the word pet.

My favourite TV shows are Agros Cartoon Conection, The Arthur show.

The clothes I like to wear are

My favourite games and toys are drafts and lego.

My favourite music/song/singer is Michael Jackson

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